

The

Communicator

MARCH/APRIL 2019

BROADBAND:
HEALTH CARE EDITION

A CONNECTED CLINIC

Filling a void in children's
health care

HAYS NATURE PRESERVE

Fun on Earth Day
and all year long

DOCTORS ON DEMAND

Telemedicine closes the
rural health care gap





BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

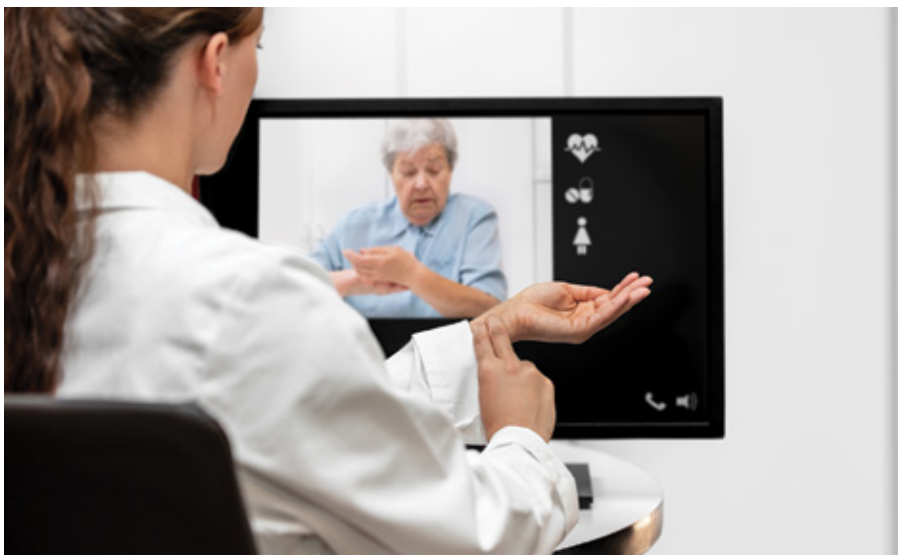
Broadband and rural health care

This magazine brings you stories of businesses operating across the broadband network your telco is building. You read of people who are working from home or getting an online degree thanks to their connection. Stories like these are endless throughout your area, and across the rural landscape served by the members of NTCA.

In this issue there is a focus on a particularly powerful use of broadband — health care. Better health leads to stronger families and happier, more productive communities. With a reliable internet connection and technology such as smartphones, tablets and monitoring devices, people of all ages have the tools to improve their health, access physicians, age in place, and live better lives. Be sure to read this issue's special health care section.

Innovative approaches to solving the challenges of rural living are nothing new for your telco and others like it across the country. Recently, I was delighted to visit with hundreds of executives and board members who lead these companies at our association's national meeting and expo. I was encouraged — as always — to be around these women and men who face the challenges of serving rural America and do an incredible job delivering some of the best broadband service in the nation.

Your community-based provider is part of a national family creating new opportunities for your community and those like it from coast to coast. From health care to education to economic development and beyond, they are building the future of rural America. 📶



Patients to have more access to telehealth services in 2020 under proposed Medicare Advantage changes

BY STEPHEN V. SMITH

The elderly and disabled who participate in Medicare Advantage programs could see more opportunities for telehealth services next year.

The proposed changes, announced in October, would remove barriers and allow Medicare Advantage plans to offer additional telehealth benefits starting in plan year 2020, according to a press release from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Seema Verma, administrator of the CMS, says these changes “give Medicare Advantage plans more flexibility to innovate in response to patients’ needs,” adding that she is “especially excited about proposed changes to allow additional telehealth benefits, which will promote access to care in a more convenient and cost-effective manner for patients.”

The key to providing telehealth services, including remote doctor visits and patient monitoring, is the availability of reliable broadband access. The research paper *Anticipating Economic Returns of Rural Telehealth*, published by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, states: “Highly advanced, state of the art telemedicine applications — including some not even yet developed — can only be possible when accessed via a high-speed, reliable broadband network. This is particularly critical in rural America, where the highest potential benefits from telemedicine — and the greatest challenges to deploying broadband — can be found.”

Rural telecommunications providers continue to expand broadband service to some of the most sparsely populated areas of the country. All of the nearly 850 NTCA member companies provide broadband service, many bringing gigabit internet speeds to their communities.

In remarks at a telehealth policy forum shortly after the CMS announcement, Verma said the proposed Medicare Advantage changes are “a major step towards expanding access to telehealth services because the rule would eliminate barriers for private Medicare Advantage plans to cover additional telehealth benefits for enrollees in MA plans.” 📶

MULTITASKING

CONSUMERS FIND NEW WAYS TO ENJOY MEDIA

Phones, tablets, streaming boxes, smart televisions, desktops, laptops and more provide consumers a wealth of opportunities to go online, resulting in increasingly complex and individualized habits for content consumption.

There is no better company to illustrate the trends than Nielsen, a global enterprise specializing in measuring and tracking consumer media trends. In December of last year, the company took a deep dive into how audiences are making use of the growing media world to create its Nielsen Total Audience Report.

Adults in the United States spent more than 10 hours daily with some form of media: live or time-shifted TV, nearly five hours; radio, nearly two hours; and digital devices, nearly three and a half hours. They often combine the tools they use. For example, someone might watch television while also surfing the web on an iPad.

Forty-five percent of those responding to a survey of Nielsen's Media Enthusiast Community watched TV while using digital devices "very often" or "always." Nearly a third reported using both platforms "sometimes," while only 12 percent never use both at the same time.

The report concluded that new digital platforms such as smartphones and tablets have changed how consumers interact with and consume media, often using multiple devices at once to create a better overall experience.

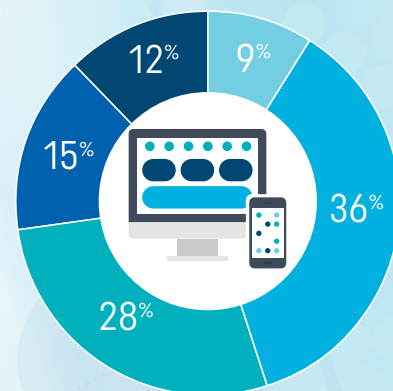
How often, for example, have you been watching a TV program, wondered what other shows an actor has appeared in and used a smartphone or tablet to find the answer? Well, you're not alone. More than 71 percent of respondents to the survey had looked up information about TV content they were viewing, and 51 percent reported the same habit for audio.

While some trends are changing as the technology landscape expands, others do not: Prime time still rules. Adult media usage still peaks from 9-10 p.m., with nearly 38 out of a possible 60 minutes spent consuming media.

The study reached a clear conclusion: Today's media landscape keeps consumers engaged. 📱



SIMULTANEOUS USAGE TV + DIGITAL



How often do you watch TV and use a digital device simultaneously?



SIMULTANEOUS USAGE OF DEVICES

DIGITAL USAGE WHILE WATCHING TV

In what ways have you used your digital device to engage with the TV content you were watching?

71%

Look up info related to the content

41%

Email | Text | Message about the content

35%

Look up | Shop for product or service being advertised

28%

Write | Read post about content on social media

15%

Switch to different content after seeing something online

DIGITAL USAGE WHILE LISTENING TO AUDIO

In what ways have you used your digital device to engage with audio content you were listening to?

51%

31%

25%

20%

14%



Broadband opens new health care frontiers

When I talk to state and local leaders, they say they're pleased by what a broadband network can do in our homes, schools and businesses. But increasingly, the place where experts and leaders are most excited about broadband technology for rural America is at the doctor's office.



JIM COOK
General Manager

The American Telemedicine Association defines "telehealth" as "the remote delivery of health care services and clinical information using telecommunications technology." It's no overstatement to say that it can revolutionize health care across our country.

And since telehealth requires high-speed broadband, we're excited to be in the middle of that revolution.

As you'll read in the pages of this issue, telehealth is already helping doctors deliver improved care to patients on cases ranging from stroke to mental health. It's helping sick people eliminate trips to the emergency room. It may even encourage doctors to come to rural clinics and hospitals.

Based on studies, telehealth is already improving patient outcomes and satisfaction while also reducing costs and increasing efficiency for health care providers.

Because of broadband technology, local residents can work with their physicians to connect with specialists around the country via virtual visits and consultations. Eliminating the hurdle of traveling to big-city hospitals has proven to make patients more likely to seek care when they need it, which translates into faster and more complete recoveries.

Telehealth can also increase the pace of care when minutes and seconds matter. Whether it's giving a stroke patient an immediate evaluation by a specialist or enabling a regional radiologist to read the X-ray of a broken arm in the middle of the night, health care providers can use technology to eliminate dangerous delays. Tapping into a regional telehealth network of experts over broadband could mean that patients don't have to wait for help from local medical professionals who may not have the expertise or simply can't be everywhere at once.

I find, however, that when explaining what telehealth is, it's also important to discuss what it's not. In my view, telehealth should not be a way to replace local physicians with robots or with doctors a patient never meets in person. Telehealth should be an essential tool and an important resource for your doctor to use in the care of his or her patients.

When we say our mission at NHTC is to improve the lives of the people in our service area, I can't think of a better way to do that than by working with talented doctors and nurses to help local residents live longer and healthier lives.

As we've built and improved our network, we're happy for the convenience and entertainment it provides. But it is health care — along with economic development and educational opportunities — that drives us to invest the millions of dollars required to build a modern communications network in our rural area. ☎

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On the Cover:



Dr. Libby Nord, medical director at New Hope Children's Clinic, holds Maci Ikard, one of about 1,000 patients at the clinic.
See story Page 12.

Attention high school seniors!

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

NHTC wants to help two local graduating high school seniors with college expenses.

One student each from the Kate Duncan Smith DAR School and New Hope High School will receive a **\$1,500** scholarship from NHTC.

To be eligible to participate in this program, applicants must:

- Be a graduating high school senior from either DAR or NHHS
- Have at least an overall B average
- Have a parent or guardian with active service with NHTC
- Complete the application process

Scholarships go to students who exemplify academic achievement and community involvement.

Applications are available online at nhtc.coop, from school guidance counselor's offices and from NHTC's business office at 5415 Main Drive in New Hope.

Don't miss out on this opportunity! Hurry, the deadline is April 5!



SAVE ^{the} DATE

2019 NHTC ANNUAL MEETING

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2019

NEW HOPE MIDDLE SCHOOL GYM

Voting starts at 5 p.m.
The business meeting
follows at 7:30 p.m.

**BE SURE TO BRING A VALID
PHOTO ID TO VOTE IN THE
BOARD ELECTION.**

-DOOR PRIZES
-REFRESHMENTS
-ENTERTAINMENT

See you there!



Spring forward!

Don't forget to move your clocks
forward one hour! Daylight saving
time will begin at 2 a.m.
on Sunday, March 10.

Home

is where the hope is

BY ANNE BRALY

Laurel,
Mississippi,
finds the
spotlight



Ben Napier and his wife, Erin, are the stars of HGTV's "Home Town" filmed in Laurel, Miss.

Brick-lined streets, century-old homes along avenues fringed with old-growth trees, cute shops, restaurants and heavenly bakeries all make Laurel, Mississippi, a charming Southern town. In its heyday, it was the lumber capital of the country. Somewhere in the 1980s, however, it became little more than a whistle-stop for people traveling between Birmingham and New Orleans.

But much changed when Erin Napier and her husband, Ben, returned to her hometown. They are the stars of the HGTV show "Home Town," now in its third season. And what they've done to bring Laurel back is nothing short of amazing.

The show's premise is this: Take an old Laurel home in need of restoration and bring it back to life with a bit of paint, some woodwork, drywall and lots of ingenuity. They turn a house in need of updates into a neighborhood showplace.

The success of "Home Town" brings people not only from around the country but also from around the world to Laurel. Visitors find renovated houses and some of the show's hot spots, including Laurel Mercantile Co. and The Scotsman General Store, both owned by the Napiers. Another stop is Pearl's, a lunch-only establishment highlighted in the show's first season. It's not uncommon to see a line at the restaurant, which features black-eyed peas and fried chicken.

FINDING A PATH

Before becoming HGTV and local celebrities, Ben Napier was a youth minister and Erin Napier made wedding invitations so pretty that they caught the eye of Martha Stewart. Long story short: He is an eternal optimist, but she is just the opposite, which led her to some self-reflection and therapy in the form of writing down one positive thought daily. Those thoughts are now collected in a book, "Make Something Good Today," but her writings, which she posted on social media, also caught the eye of HGTV. The rest is history.

"There was a defeatist attitude that permeated the town, a kind of communal and contagious giving up," Ben Napier says.

Small towns with allure



BARDSTOWN, KENTUCKY:

With a population of just more than 13,000, the community offers small-town living loaded with Southern charm.

In the center of the Bluegrass State, Bardstown is Kentucky's second-oldest town, founded in 1780. It holds dear its claim as the Bourbon Capital of the World, and it has been named by USA Today and Rand McNally as the Most Beautiful Small Town in America.

Bardstown has nearly 300 structures on the National Register of Historic Places, including a stagecoach stop built in 1779 that now stands as the Old Talbott Tavern, a bed-and-breakfast and restaurant.

► **Details:** www.visitbardstown.com

BELL BUCKLE, TENNESSEE:

The name comes from a creek of the same name. The town, which dates back to 1852, exudes Southern hospitality. Its people are friendly, and it offers a laid-back vibe that appeals to the visitors who come for a day or overnight stays in one of several bed-and-breakfasts.

The downtown features a row of businesses with rocking-chair front porches covered by metal shed roofs. It's a place where fried green tomato sandwiches are the go-to meal at Bluebird Antiques and Ice Cream Parlor.

Only about 600 people live in Bell Buckle, but that number easily swells into the thousands every June during the Moon Pie Festival or during weekends in October when The Webb School plays host to its huge Arts and Crafts Fair.

► **Details:** townofbellbuckle.com

AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA:

This town boasts a thriving arts scene, is home to a number of equestrian events, has a dynamic restaurant presence and offers numerous choices for overnight stays.

Catch the three-day Antiques in the Heart of Aiken show and sale in February, horse shows throughout the year, a couple of steeplechase events during the year and bluegrass at the Aiken County Fairgrounds in May. But it doesn't have to be a special event that brings you to town. The Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame is open year-round, as are the Aiken County Historical Museum and the Center for African American History, Arts and Culture.

► **Details:** www.visitaikensc.com



"The perception from the inside was that Laurel was a dying town and a relic of a once-booming past. I didn't see it that way at all. It was beautiful, but it wasn't putting its best face forward. Our mission was twofold: We wanted Laurel to be the way Erin remembered it, but at the same time, we wanted to bring a little big-city style and culture into it, because we wanted to change the perception of living in a small town. We wanted others to realize that coming home wasn't 'settling.' It could represent a deep connection to your roots and a commitment to preserving the goodness of a small, tightknit community."

Since the launch of "Home Town," tourism to Laurel has grown tenfold, says George Bassi, tourism chairman for the Jones County Chamber of Commerce. "It used to be we'd see maybe 10 people downtown. Now there are more than 100 on the streets every day," he says. "It's so much fun for us to see the town come alive."

While the homes featured on the show, including that of the Napiers, are not open for public tours, there are plenty of reasons for folks to linger in town. They can visit the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art and its exquisite collections of British Georgian silver and American works from the likes of John Henry Twachtman and Winslow Homer. They can walk through parks designed by Frederick Olmsted, the same man who designed New York's Central Park. Then they might lunch at Pearl's or dine at one of several restaurants, such as Mimmo's, known for authentic, made-from-scratch Italian, or The Loft for a good steak.

After three seasons of filming, the Napiers have found their rhythm in making "Home Town." "The show made sense as part of the overall mission," Ben Napier says. "With each house we saved, we felt we were putting Laurel back in its rightful place on the map." 🗺️

FIBER-READY

NHTC receives national certification

BY LISA SAVAGE

With New Hope Telephone Cooperative's internet service, customers can stream movies or shows, work from home, or play games online with friends. NHTC is committed to ensuring their customers get the fastest, most reliable broadband available through its fiber optic network.

This dedication to providing a state-of-the-art network has earned NHTC the Fiber Broadband Association's All-Fiber Certification.

The All-Fiber Certification is available to all association members that demonstrate a high-level, strategic commitment to fiber deployment by ensuring 90 percent or more of their network relies on fiber optic



infrastructure. NHTC's network covers 100 percent of the 300-square-mile service area in northeast Marshall and southeast Madison counties.

"We couldn't be more proud to be recognized by the Fiber Broadband Association as one of the first All-Fiber Certified service providers," says Jim Cook, NHTC general manager. "Every day we work to meet the ever-changing needs of our customers, and this one-of-its-kind certification further demonstrates our commitment to building a better, more connected broadband future."

INVESTED IN COMMUNITY

NHTC began to build a fiber-to-the-home network to all 4,900 customers in 2009. Since then, the cooperative has invested \$30 million in the community. The network gives the cooperative the ability to offer internet speeds of up to 1 Gbps, or 1,000 Mbps, nearly 100 times faster than the national average.

"This national designation represents not only the hard work completed by our employees but also the cooperative's commitment to our community," Cook says.

"Communities across the country are becoming more aware of how important and effective fiber networks are," says Lisa Youngers, executive director of the Fiber Broadband Association.

"This certification program is designed to help all-fiber network operator members highlight the critical work they are doing to bring all-fiber connectivity to those they serve," she says. "It's a way to identify those who are truly bringing the best internet and digital services to their communities."

The Fiber Broadband Association is the only trade association in the Americas dedicated to the pursuit of all fiber optic network infrastructure to the home and to businesses. The goal is to help build a better broadband future around the world.

NHTC also was named a certified Gig-Capable Provider by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association in 2017. The work NHTC has done to provide a fiber-to-the-home network for all customers prepares the cooperative for exploding demand for more connected devices. "It allows us to meet customer broadband needs now and in the future," Cook says. 📶

Celebrating Earth Day

Festival is popular at Hays Nature Preserve

BY LISA SAVAGE

Opportunities to learn to cast a fly rod, take a nature walk to look for wildlife, watch the release of thousands of butterflies or eat free hot dogs and cotton candy make Hays Nature Preserve the place to be on April 20 to celebrate Earth Day.

The preserve's Earth Day Festival attracts between 12,000 and 15,000 people to the park for the day, says Denise Taylor, program manager for Hays Nature Preserve and Goldsmith Schiffman Wildlife Sanctuary, both of which the city of Huntsville owns and maintains. Between 80 and 90 businesses and organizations set up displays for informational purposes, but no selling is allowed. Each vendor is required to have some type of free, hands-on activity for children.

"We try to make sure it's a fun day for the kids," Taylor says. "It's a great opportunity to find out what's available at the preserve or pick up a little knowledge about the outdoors."

The festival has been so popular that the park began a similar event in the fall. The Fallen Leaf Festival focuses on trees, leaves and things popular in the fall. Master Gardeners teach about mulching and composting using leaves and other materials. A date for this year's festival isn't set.

"We had a big pile of leaves raked up for kids to run through. One little boy ran through, and he had never done that before, and he had so much fun," Taylor says.

There's plenty to do at the preserve throughout the year.

A GIFT OF NATURE

The Hays family donated the 538 acres to the city of Huntsville in 1999 for a park with a stipulation that the land could never be sold.



Hays Nature Preserve marks Earth Day with a celebration each year.

Improvements through the years now make the preserve one of the most popular areas for hiking and biking. Several miles of paved trails follow the Flint River through the natural habitat, old fields and a golf course. The trails are handicapped-accessible. There are also restrooms, picnic areas and a viewing area.

A natural playground near the entrance is a highlight for kids. There are numerous outdoor activities and educational programs with subjects ranging from pollinator gardens to what lives in the river.

Art at the Preserve, with activities such as painting rocks or making picture frames, has quite a following with several events throughout the year. "We try to have something that would interest everybody," Taylor says.

Adults can enjoy Yoga by the River each Saturday in the months of May, September and October. "You can't beat the soundtrack," she says.

On any given day, especially Saturdays, there's usually something going on. Between 20,000 and 30,000 children registered last year for activities. Registration is required, but activities are free. An adult must accompany each child.

"We want to plant that seed for children to love the outdoors and have an enjoyable time outside," Taylor says. 🌱

HAYS NATURE PRESERVE

7161 U.S. Highway 431,
Owens Cross Roads, near the
intersection of Taylor Lane.

The park is open daily from
sunrise to sunset. For more
information, visit the Operation
Green Team Facebook page.



Closing the gap

Broadband brings high-tech health to rural communities

BY DREW WOOLLEY

In rural communities, the local pharmacy is often more than just a place to pick up over-the-counter cold medicine and fill prescriptions. It's the first stop for all things health care.

"We've had trouble keeping doctors in our town," says Cole Sandlin, owner of Fred's Pharmacy in Hamilton, Alabama. "We are the first health care center for most people, and that goes for all independent pharmacies in small towns."

Fred's Pharmacy, independently owned since 1951, has been in the Sandlin family for three generations. Since he took over the business from his parents in 2014, Sandlin has seen people travel nearly an hour to cities like Jasper, Alabama, or Tupelo, Mississippi, just to visit a general practitioner.

So he jumped at the opportunity to install a telemedicine kiosk at his pharmacy as part of a pilot program with American Well. The company provides services connecting patients and doctors.

Installed in December 2017, the kiosk gave Hamilton residents the chance to consult with a remote physician without the lengthy drive.

The kiosk was equipped with devices to monitor blood pressure, oxygen levels, skin and ear health, and more. In short,



Cole Sandlin, left, works with the telemedicine kiosk installed in 2017 at his pharmacy in Hamilton, Alabama, as part of a pilot program with American Well.

Photo courtesy of Mandy Green.

it gave patients access to routine medical care right down the street.

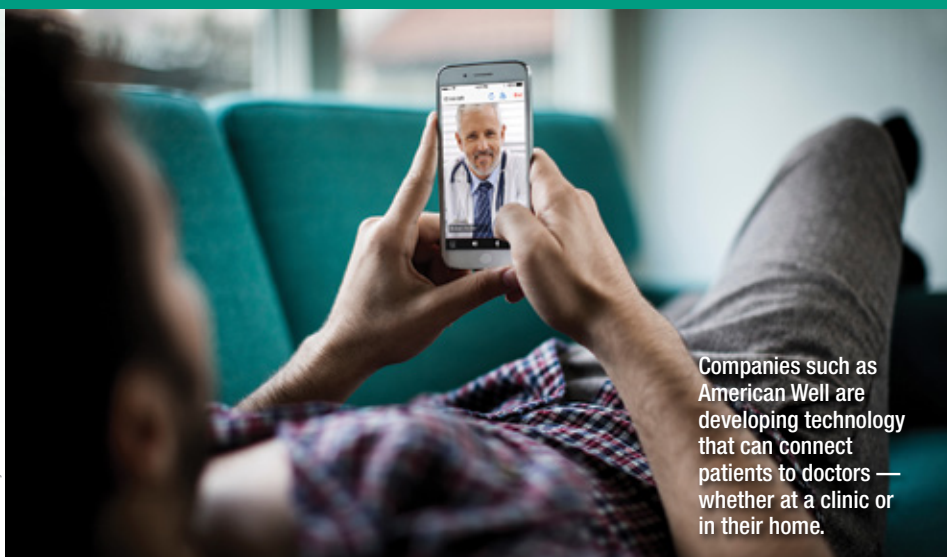
"For us, it just provides another avenue in our store to help patients," says Sandlin. "And in my little town of Hamilton, I want everybody to have the same amenities people have in bigger cities."

A SMARTER APPROACH

That gap between health care access in rural and urban areas is a challenge not just in Hamilton but throughout the country — a problem largely brought on by the rapid advancement of medical technology over the last century.

"Seventy-five years ago, when doctors carried most of what we could do in a black bag, you could have about the same care in tiny towns as you did in the big city," says Dr. Nancy Dickey, executive director of Texas A&M's Rural and Community Health Institute. "The reality today is it takes a much bigger patient base to pay for high-tech care."

But thanks to modern broadband connections, patients no longer have to make a trip in person to benefit from the latest medical technology. Electronic medical records allow a specialist hundreds of miles away to stay apprised of a rural



Companies such as American Well are developing technology that can connect patients to doctors — whether at a clinic or in their home.

patient's condition while the patient has remote checkups at a local clinic or pharmacy.

“What we always try to tell people is that telemedicine is not meant to replace a physician,” says Lloyd Sirmons, director of the Southeastern Telehealth Resource Center. “The whole goal behind telemedicine is to create access.”

While some rural clinics may be deterred by the idea that telemedicine requires expensive technology beyond their means, Sirmons is quick to point out that flashy setups aren't always the answer. A remote mental health counseling program, for example, is relatively easy and inexpensive to establish.

“It doesn't take much in the way of equipment,” he says. “I can take a laptop, one I use every day as a physician, and download software that gives me the ability to connect to a specialist. Then, I have a telemedicine unit.”

SUPPORT NETWORK

For larger health networks, broadband connectivity gives every hospital and clinic on their system access to the same quality of care. One such system is Essentia Health, which consists of 17 hospitals, about 70 clinics and eight nursing homes across Wisconsin, North Dakota and Northern Minnesota.

Since bringing on Maureen Ideker as a senior telehealth adviser six years ago, Essentia has installed videoconferencing

technology at each of its locations. “They wanted to stretch scarce specialist resources to bring their expertise to rural communities, and that's what we did,” she says.

In all, Essentia clinics and hospitals have access to about 30 specialist programs, including stroke, psychiatry and neonatal care. Larger hospitals can even partner with local pharmacies to design prescription dosages to ease patients who struggle with opioids off their addiction.

Ideker estimates that Essentia specialists see around 5,000 patients via telemedicine annually, with patients' satisfaction improving as they have grown accustomed to the new technology. It also provides needed support for rural physicians.

“If you're the only health provider in a rural community, that can be a pretty isolated feeling,” Ideker says. “I think they feel a lot of support from this, which makes for happier doctors who are likely to stay around longer.”

NEW SOLUTIONS

As broadband continues to open up health care opportunities in rural communities, new challenges also arise. Along with educating patients about the medical options available to them, Sirmons sees consistent insurance coverage for telemedicine and across the board as one of the biggest hurdles to its adoption.

That hurdle was enough to put an end to telemedicine at Fred's Pharmacy, at least for now. Despite hoping to continue offer-

ing consultations through the American Well kiosk, Sandlin was forced to end the service after the pilot program concluded due to a lack of insurance coverage for users.

“We were probably a little ahead of our time, but it was an opportunity we didn't want to miss,” he says. “We learned a lot, and we plan to have telemedicine back as soon as it's covered.”

In fact, according to experts like Dickey, as broadband internet becomes more widespread, telemedicine won't just be an option in rural communities. Patients will increasingly demand it. The rise of technology in medicine may be the source of the health care gap, but she believes it can close it as well.

“Not everything can be done by telemedicine,” Dickey says. “But if we can provide medical care for someone in space using this technology, we can probably close the distance between your local clinic and the next big city.”

Did you know?

Kentucky and Tennessee passed telehealth parity laws in 2000 and 2016, respectively, that require private insurance companies to reimburse telehealth services at comparable rates to in-person care. In 2016, Alabama also enacted a partial parity law to cover remote mental health services.

In South Carolina, live video consultations are covered by Medicaid in some circumstances, while Kentucky Medicaid recipients can be reimbursed for video consultations and teleradiology.

➔ To learn more about telehealth reimbursement in your state, visit cchpca.org.



NEW HOPE CHILDREN'S CLINIC

Serving the
community for
10 years



Doris Smith, a registered nurse at New Hope Children's Clinic, measures the height of 4-year-old Zoey Parker during an exam at the clinic.

BY LISA SAVAGE

Maci Ikard, not yet 2 years old, looked wary as Dr. Libby Nord walked into the examination room. Nord pulled a stuffed brown rabbit from behind her back, and Maci broke into a smile. It was the child's second visit that week, and she needed another breathing treatment for bronchitis.

Maci warmed up to the doctor and played with the rabbit as Nord listened to her lungs. By the time Nord started the breathing treatment, Maci held the nebulizer over her mouth and took the treatment easily.

Maci is one of about 1,000 patients at New Hope Children's Clinic, and that visit was one of about 3,000 patient encounters last year. That's up from 500 patient encounters in 2009, the year the clinic opened.

The nonprofit clinic on the campus of New Hope Elementary celebrates 10 years of service this year. The clinic has patients from Madison, Marshall and Jackson counties. Children from rural areas nearby, such as Grant and Guntersville in Marshall County and Woodville and Paint Rock in Jackson County, account for a large number of patients there, says the clinic's executive director, Cindi Williamson.

About 80 percent of the clinic's patients are covered through Medicaid, a state program that provides health insurance for eligible individuals. Very few other area pediatricians accept Medicaid.

"We're filling a huge void in child care," Nord says.

CARING FOR PATIENTS

The clinic still sees patients for sick and well visits, but it's not uncommon now for providers to see more complex cases, Nord says. One patient recently received a leukemia diagnosis at the clinic, got a referral to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and was admitted there in less than 24 hours.

The New Hope Children's Clinic is for kids ages 18 and younger. While it's on the grounds of the elementary school, it's not specifically a clinic for the school. However, if a student who is a patient becomes ill, the youngster can be treated at the clinic that day.



Dr. Libby Nord administers a breathing treatment for Maci Ikard at New Hope Children's Clinic.

The clinic also provides mental health care to an ever-growing number of young patients. "Taking care of children with mental health issues is more difficult through the lens of poverty," Nord says. The clinic partners with Wellstone Behavioral Health's Nova Center for Youth and Family, which has an extensive presence in public schools.

Now, two mental health counselors are based at New Hope Elementary. Not all students who see a counselor at the school are patients at the clinic, but those who are benefit tremendously because the counselors and physicians can work more closely to address these children's needs.

Another need that has been addressed at the clinic is technology. With fiber internet through NHTC, the clinic now has electronic medical records and other benefits. The fast and reliable internet service also allows the clinic to explore options for telemedicine that weren't possible before. "We are so excited about the possibilities of what we're going to be able to do when it comes to telemedicine," Nord says.

FILLING A GAP

The clinic has come a long way since the beginning when Nord says her eyes were opened to the need. She had volunteered in a school-based clinic, but the clinics in the local schools closed.

As a pediatrician in private practice, she wanted to do more. "I felt like God wanted to use me in a different way," she says. She began working at Huntsville Hospital for Women and Children's pediatric emergency room. Her flexible shifts gave her more time at the clinic.

Nord's church, Cove United Methodist, provided seed money to start the New Hope Children's Clinic, and Huntsville Hospital also paid for some of the costs. The church still helps financially, she says.

The clinic provides treatment of acute injuries and illnesses, routine well-check visits, management of chronic medical problems such as childhood asthma, physical exams and health screenings,

vaccines, sports physicals, laboratory testing, nutrition counseling and weight management, referral for follow-up specialty care, and health education.

When the clinic is closed on Fridays, the Madison County Health Department operates the county's only satellite office for WIC, the Women, Infants and Children supplemental nutrition program for pregnant women, breastfeeding women, women who have recently had a baby and children up to 5 years old who are at nutritional risk. Many families can't or won't drive to Huntsville to the health department's main office on Max Luther Drive for the service, Nord says.

"They might only have one vehicle, don't have gas money or just can't go that far," she says. "There are so many barriers that prevent them from going. We're so proud that we can be a part of helping more women, infants and children get the nutritional help they need. It doesn't matter if you qualify for something. If you can't access it, then it doesn't matter. The program brings the service to where the people are."

The clinic has filled many voids as it has grown through the years. Nord no longer works at the emergency room and devotes all her time to the clinic.

"It's a privilege to be able to be a part of this community," Nord says. "The community trusts us with their children, and we've earned that trust. It's our goal to have healthy kids. They can't learn if they're sick." 📞



Cindi Williamson is executive director at New Hope Children's Clinic, serving about 1,000 patients from Madison, Marshall and Jackson counties.

MORE ABOUT NEW HOPE CHILDREN'S CLINIC

Funding for New Hope Children's Clinic, a nonprofit, comes from grants, donations, Medicaid reimbursements and fundraising activities.

The biggest fundraising event each year, Casino Night, is scheduled for March 29. For more information contact the clinic.

New Hope Children's Clinic
156 Church Ave., New Hope, on the grounds of the elementary school.

256-723-4673

Clinic hours: 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Thursday.

The health department's WIC program for Women, Infants and Children operates in the building from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. on Fridays.



Palmetto Sweets

Spring onions bring a taste of the South

About this time every year, the gems of spring — Southern-grown onions — appear on grocery shelves, and they are certainly a long-awaited treat for onion lovers. Unlike those other onions that bring you to tears, these are so mild they're considered tear-free. Many people love them so much they bite right into them like an apple.

When people think of sweet onions, most envision Georgia's Vidalias. But South Carolina Palmetto Sweets, which entered the market about a decade ago, are gaining ground.

Dupre Percival is a caterer and restaurateur who is passionate about South Carolina products, including Palmetto Sweets. "We're known for our foods," he says of his home state. "Our grits. Our peaches. Our peanuts. And dishes like our Frogmore Stew. I add a lot of onions to that. When you think South Carolina, you think food."

Most Palmetto Sweets are grown in the state's Piedmont region, where the weather is just a bit cooler and the soil, much like that across the border in Georgia's Vidalia-growing counties, is rich and loamy. But, Percival notes, soil changes from place to place. "You can have two fields of onions on one farm and they won't taste the same," he says. However, no matter the sweetness, they're all good for cooking.

A PASSION FOR FOOD

A good part of the 70-year-old restaurateur's early years was spent in real estate. He entered the restaurant business in the 1970s for a few years after assuming financial obligations for two sub and pizza restaurants. Within a month, take-out orders were coming in and a side catering business was established.

Fast-forward through a couple of decades: The two pizza restaurants are

closed, but Percival continues to cater through his Dupre Catering and Events. Five years ago, he opened The Market Restaurant at the State Farmers Market in West Columbia, South Carolina. "I'm a caterer who owns a restaurant now," he says from his home in Irmo, a bedroom community to Columbia.

Two much-loved items on his catering menu are his tomato pie and the onion dip. Both call for sweet onions, but Percival always adds more than the recipe calls for.

"Sweet onions have a gentler impact in recipes," he says. "If you put sweet onions in an omelet or in a dip, it gives it a good onion taste without overpowering it. Every recipe requires balance. I'll put onions in some recipes that don't call for them. But when you don't put onions in recipes that do call for them, they're not right. The dish is not good without them."



FOOD EDITOR
ANNE P. BRALY
IS A NATIVE OF
CHATTANOOGA,
TENNESSEE.



CAROLINA SWEET ONION DIP

This is a signature dish for Dupre Catering.

- 1 cup finely chopped sweet onions
- 1 cup mayonnaise (preferably Duke's)
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Paprika
- Pita chips

Heat oven to 325 degrees. Combine onions, mayonnaise and cheese and place in baking dish. Lightly dust top with paprika and bake for 20-30 minutes or until bubbly and brown on top. Serve with pita chips.

Tip: Add collard greens that have been cooked, mashed and very well-drained to this dip for a taste explosion.

SWEET ONION TOMATO PIE

Dupre Percival says using Duke's mayonnaise and Sunbeam bread makes a big difference in the outcome.

- 1 1/4 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1-2 tablespoons finely minced sweet onion
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Pepper, to taste
- 15 slices day-old bread, divided
- 10 medium ripe tomatoes, washed, cored and sliced (the freshest and ripest you can find)

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Prepare cheese spread by combining cheese with mayonnaise, onion, salt and pepper.

Grease a 9- by 12-inch casserole dish with butter, olive oil or cooking spray. Layer the bottom evenly with 7 slices of bread cut into medium-sized cubes.

Create a layer of tomatoes by overlapping them in a single layer on top of the bread cubes. This usually can be done with 5 of the tomatoes making 4 rows. Season liberally with salt and pepper.

Trim the crusts from the remaining slices of bread and place the slices over the top so that they completely cover the tomatoes. Spread the slices with the cheese spread. Cover well, but don't be tempted to use too much cheese spread or the pie will be soggy. Arrange the remaining tomatoes in slices in the same manner as before. Then, season with salt and pepper. Dollop the rest of the cheese spread in rows across the top or in whatever design you want.

Bake, uncovered, for 25 minutes or until the cheese mixture becomes golden brown. Makes about 15 servings as a side dish.

Note: The pie can be dressed up by adding fresh herbs such as basil, oregano and marjoram to the cheese mixture.



ROASTED BALSAMIC ONIONS

Always a sweet way to enjoy the sweet onions of the South.

- 2 large sweet onions, peeled
- Coarse salt and coarsely ground pepper, to taste
- 4 tablespoons butter
- Good-quality balsamic vinegar

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a baking dish just large enough to hold the onions. Slice off the top and the bottom parts of the onions so they sit flat in the baking dish; cut the onions in half.

Arrange the onion halves, cut side up, in the prepared baking dish. Season with salt and pepper, and place 1 tablespoon of butter on each half.

Cover the baking dish with aluminum foil and bake 50 to 60 minutes or until onions give slightly when the edges are squeezed together between your fingers. Remove from oven. Uncover and sprinkle each onion half with balsamic vinegar while using a fork to spread the onion layers apart so that the vinegar can dribble down between them. Serve hot or at room temperature. Makes an excellent side dish to a juicy grilled steak. 🍷



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